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ABSTRACT

Defining defensiveness as a protective reaction resulting from fear or a threat to one's face or ego, this paper provides a perspective on both verbal and nonverbal aspects of defensiveness. First, the paper examines two trait-like communication predispositions--communication apprehension and touch avoidance--which arguably produce defensive behavior. Communication apprehensives are described as displaying three predominant interrelated behavior patterns characterized by withdrawal, reduced awareness, and tension, posited to be self-protective responses that paradoxically cause a negative spiral of fear, anxiety, and defensiveness. Similarly, while communication apprehension affects the likelihood of verbal contact, touch avoidance may affect the likelihood of nonverbal contact and increased intimacy. Next, the literature on disconfirmation (defined as behavior that causes another person to value himself less, with disconfirming communication characterized as indirect, closed, and ambiguous) is examined for its contribution to the defensiveness construct. Three different yet overlapping styles of disconfirming communication are discussed in the paper: (1) indifference; (2) imperviousness; and (3) disqualification. Finally, research on nonverbal immediacy (viewed as the inverse of defensiveness) is reviewed to derive some additional nonverbal behaviors asscciated with defensiveness. Seventy-one references are attached. (SR)

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Avoiding Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal Dimensions of Defensiveness

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Avoiding Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal Dimensions of Defensiveness

Although communication researchers have studied interpersonal conflict (e.g., Sillars, 1980a; Sillars, 1980b; Sillars & Parry, 1982; Steinfatt, 1974; and Watkins, 1974) and power (e.g., Berger, 1985; and Seibold, Cantrill & Meyers, 1985) the related construct of defensiveness has received little attention. This lack of research on defensive behavior seems especially inappropriate since Gibb (1961) conceptualized defensiveness as a behavior which blocks effective communication and problem-solving.

Intuitively, defensiveness should be manifested in a number of contexts. Conflict situations should produce the situation where defensive behaviors would be manifested. Likewise, the use of power, particularly coercive power, would be likely to produce defensive behavior in others. It is also likely that certain personal characteristics or traits such as dogmatism, chronic anxiety, or communication apprehension would produce defensive behaviors or at least produce behaviors which are perceived to be defensive. Most importantly, it is likely that certain situational contexts interact with personal traits to produce what could be described as defensive behavior. For example, individuals with low self-confidence might feel quite inclined to defend themselves in a conflict situation. Without the presence of both the situation and personal characteristics, defensiveness would not occur; it is an interaction of situation and person (see P. Andersen, 1987).

Perhaps there are reasons why defensiveness has not been widely employed as a communication construct. First, defensiveness has never been clearly conceptualized and defined. The extent to which defensiveness overlaps with

other constructs such as aggressiveness, anger, hostility, fear, protectiveness, apprehension, anxiety, or shyness is unclear. Recently, several scholars have attemped defining defensiveness in several special contexts. Blanchard and Williams (1987), in a study of animal behavior, maintained that defensive behaviors are responses to fear due to an actual attack. Argyris (1985), in an examination of defensive organizational behavior, provided this definition: "Defensive routines are thoughts and actions used to protect individuals', groups', and organizations' usual ways of dealing with reality" (p. 5). These definitions fail to provide a general framework nor do they distinguish defensiveness from the host of related behaviors listed above.

A second problem with this body of research is that defensiveness has never really been operationalized nor empirically investigated. The seminal work in this area (Gibb, 1961) contains no measure, test, or behavioral observations of the construct of defensive communication. Several recent studies (Asendorpf & Sherer, 1983; Hurley & Myers, 1987; and Millham & Kellogg, 1980) have employed the Growne-Marlowe social desirability scale as a measure of psychological defensiveness. Unfortunately, this is not an interactionally-based or communication-based measure and its validity as a measure of social desirability is more firmly established than its validity as a measure of defensiveness.

Third, since defensive communication has no clear behavioral markers (Sillars, 1989), it requires that receivers and researchers engage in considerable attributional effort to label a particular behavior as defensive. Indeed, the ultimate definition of defensiveness may be any behavior which other's perceive as defensive. Blanchard and Williams (1987) provide an account of defensive behaviors in rats which may have some limited

applicability to human communication. Argyris (1985) provides some behavior examples of defensive reactions to intolerable bosses that include avoidance, open resistance, and waiting for a good moment, but provide no way to distinguish these from nondefensive behaviors.

In this paper we will attempt to examine behaviors that are consistent with Gibb's (1961) original effort to describe defensive communication. For the purposes of the present paper, defensiveness is a protective reaction resulting from fear or a threat to one's face or ego. Inherently, defensiveness features the communication relationship since the content is relatively less important than the need for individuals to maintain face within the relational context. Paradoxically, defensive reactions often result in a further loss of face, threat to the ego, and relational problems.

In this paper we will provide a perspective on both verbal and nonverbal aspects of defensiveness. First, we will examine two communication predispositions--communication apprehension and touch avoidance, which arguably produce defensive behavior and index trait dispositions in the verbal and nonverbal domains respectively. Next, the literature on disconfirmation will be examined for its contribution to the defensiveness construct. Finally, research on nonverbal immediacy will be reviewed to derive some additional nonverbal behaviors associated with defensiveness.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension is defined as the level of fear an individual associates with either real or anticipated oral communication with another person (McCroskey, 1982). As we will demonstrate, fear is a primary

antecedent of defensive reactions. If this is the case, then the behavioral reactions of high communication apprehensives should provide an impressive catalog of defensive behaviors. Since communication apprehension has been the most widely researched communication variable during the past two decades (DeWine & Pearson, 1985; Lustig & P. Andersen, 1988), the considerable number of behavioral reactions to this phenomena can be summarized. Moreover, since communication apprehension is fear of interaction it should yield responses which are interactionally-based forms of defensiveness.

The literature on defensiveness clearly maintains that defensiveness is primarily a response to fear and threat and is compounded by insecurity. Research on defensive behavior in animals has shown that fear and anxiety systems in animals and humans are the main cause of defensive behaviors (Blanchard & Williams, 1987). In the opening sentence of his seminal piece on defensive communication Gibb (1961) stated, "Defensive behavior is defined as that behavior which occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in the group" (p. 141). In his later work on trust Gibb (1978) maintained, "Trust theory implies that hostile, aggressive behavior comes from defense against perceived or anticipated attack" (p. 119). Argyris' (1985) writing about organizational defensiveness contended that, "Defensive routines are thoughts and actions used to protect individuals', groups', and organizations', usual ways of dealing with reality. Defensive routines come between the individual or organization and any threats in the environment." Recent experimental work on defensive responses found that hostile groups compared to nonhostile groups reported significantly more threat, fear and guilt (Beck, 1988). Similarly, Gudjonsson (1981) found trait anxiety, defensiveness, and emotional levels to be somewhat predictive of one another.

Since communication apprehension is a fear of talking, and since fear is the primary antecedent of defensiveness, examination of the behavior of communication apprehensives should provide an excellent catalog of defensive behaviors. As we will illustrate below, communication apprehensives, reticents, and socially anxious individuals display three predominant interrelated behavior patterns characterized by withdrawal, reduced awareness, and tension.

The Withdrawal Response

The most basic and fundamental defensive reaction of high communication apprehensives is withdrawal. Daly (1978) reported that high school students with high social anxiety talked less during interviews than their less anxious counterparts. Schlenker and Leary (1985) found that subjects with high social anxiety failed to participate fully in interaction, exhibited an introversion or reticence, and physically or psychologically withdrew from the situation. Burgoon and Koper (1984) reported that among reticents and communication apprehensives, "cues of detachment, nonaffiliation, and nonintimacy were more pronounced" (p. 615).

A number of studies have reported that communication apprehensives avoid eye contact and face-to-face communication. Daly (1978) found that highly socially-anxious subjects spent less time in eye contact and exhibited shorter durations of eye contact than less anxious subjects. P. Andersen and Coussoule (1980) argued that high communication apprehensives' failure to observe intimacy cues was due to their low levels of eye contact. Burgoon and Koper (1984) found that communication apprehension and reticence were negatively correlated with eye contact across several experiments. Several

studies have also shown that experimentally induced interpersonal stress is associated with low levels of eye contact (Exline & Winters, 1965; Slane, Dragan, Crandall & Payne, 1980). Indeed, even general trait anxiety is negatively associated with eye contact (Eckman, 1978).

Other avoidance behaviors are correlated with increased social anxiety as well. Burgoon and Koper (1989) found that during interaction communication apprehension and reticence were associated with more backward leans, more body blocking or barrier behavior, and more face covering. Across a series of forty geographically diverse samples J. Andersen, Lustig, & P. Andersen (1987) reported strong evidence that communication apprehension is associated with touch avoidance. Not surprisingly, communication apprehensives are perceived as nonaffiliative by others (Burgoon & Koper, 1984).

The avoidance behavior of high communication apprehensives represents the classic flight response of humans and other animals. The simplest way to avoid fear and anxiety is to withdraw. Unfortunately, social situations are rarely simple, as various avoidance responses short of full-blown flight are the most effective and appropriate defense.

Reduced Social Awareness

A series of studies demonstrate that communication apprehensives are oblivious to various social and environmental cues. Obviously, a fearful individual in a threatening situation might profit from increased social awareness since this information would facilitate functional adaptations and adjustments. Unfortunately, the anxiety experienced by communication apprehensives produces various defensive responses that actually screen out

relevant social information and create a cycle of confusion and fear. Considerable evidence now supports this conclusion.

Several studies have suggested that during interaction communication apprehensives become self-focused and self-conscious rather than other-focused. P. Andersen and Singleton (1978) summarized several studies which suggest that communication apprehensives are cerebrotonic, a trait characterized by excessive self-focus, introversion, and tension. P. Andersen and Coussoule (1980) reported the results of an experiment on the interpersonal perceptions of high communication apprehensives (CAs) which concluded that "high CA individuals did not generally perceive significant differences between gaze conditions, even though gaze was operationalized as two extreme conditions." P. Andersen (1986) suggested that extreme self- awareness and self-consciousness is detrimental to effective communication and concluded that "Economy in consciousness is essential to competence in communication" (p. 97). According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), self- consciousness is particularly detrimental to competence and typically increases anxiety. Evidence suggests that socially-anxious individuals are not only self-focused but preoccupied with negative aspects of their performance. Schlenker and Leary (1985) concluded that when socially anxious individuals are threatened, "their minds race with thoughts about the unreachable goal and their problems in attaining it; they become self-preoccupied and self-focused, continually re-examining their limitations" (p. 180).

Other research suggests that a syndrome of problematic defensive reactions produces a cycle of anxiety and incompetence in communication apprehensives. The lack of eye contact used by CAs (described above) compounds their inability to receive relevant social information (P. Andersen

and Coussoule, 1980). Their backward leans and facial covering further limits important social information. Their excessive self-focus prevents psychological attention to the other and the situation. Recently, Keeley-Dyreson, Bailey and Burgoon (1988) confirmed that experimentally-induced stress decreases nonverbal decoding accuracy over time. The biggest effects occurred late in the conversations suggesting that stress may have cumulative detriments to nonverbal decoding accuracy. Moreover, the greatest decrease in decoding ability was in the vocal channel suggesting that decreased sensitivity is not only a function of decreased eye contact but also of decreased cognitive processing.

The entire discussion above is consistent with the fragments of evidence and opinion in the defensiveness literature. In Gibb's (1961) original work he maintained that "defensive recipients distort what they received. As a person becomes more and more defensive, he becomes less and less able to perceive accurately the motives, the values, and the emotions of the sender" (p. 142). More recently, Gibb (1978) suggested that fear reduces awareness and consciousness. Argyris (1985) maintained that defensive reaction protects individuals but simultaneously inhibits learning, particularly about how to reduce the threat.

Withdrawal, hostility and other defensive reactions should be expected in the apprehensive communicator. The apprehension syndrome of increased self-focus, decreased other-focus, reduced visual monitoring, partial withdrawal from the situation, and inefficient cognitive processing of social information produces a spiral of fear, negativity, panic, incompetence, and confusion. Defensive reactions are socially maladaptive and can only be

reduced by breaking this pattern of dysfunctional monitoring, cognition and affect.

Tension

The third behavioral pattern exhibited by communication apprehensiveness is tension. Increased tension has the simultaneous effects of increasing anxiety through somatic feedback, of limiting blood flow to various parts of the body including the brain, and sending negative, confusing messages to conversational partners.

Several studies suggest a pattern of increased tension and nervous behavior in high communication apprehensives. Burgoon, Pfau, Birk, and Manusov (1987) found that reticent, avoidant communicators were significantly more tense than less reticent individuals. Schlenker and Leary (1985) reported that "High social anxiety is associated with an array of nervous responses including fidgeting, self-manipulation, perspiration, and the appearance of overall tension" (p. 178). It is unclear whether self-manipulations and adaptors actually increase since one article reported several significant correlations between reticence and self-touching (Burgoon & Koper, 1984) but two other studies failed to find such a relationship (Burgoon et al., 1987; Comadena & P. Anderson, 1978). Nonetheless, the preponderance of evidence suggests that reticent, apprehensive communicators display more visual signs of tension. Burgoon and Koper (1984) concluded that "compared to nonreticents, reticents tend to show more negative forms of arousal through increased bodily tension, more self-touching and more protective behaviors" (p. 618). Since bodily relaxation is an immediacy cue that leads to more

positive, intimate interactions (P. Andersen, 1985) that leads to perceptions of increased credibility and attraction (Jensen & P. Andersen, 1979), tension has certain negative interpersonal consequences. Excessive tension is also perceived as a potential buildup of aggressive or hostile tension release (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974). Other interactants often display defensive behaviors as a response to this tension, leading to an interpersonal spiral of tense, defensive reactions.

Touch Avoidance

While communication apprehension affects the likelihood of verbal contact, touch avoidance may affect the likelihood of nonverbal contact and increased intimacy. Human touch has been reported to be the most powerful nonverbal cue involved in the development of intimacy (Hickson & Stacks, 1985; Morris, 1971). Early research by Mehrabian (1969) found touch to be a primary component of intimacy. More recent work by J. Andersen et al. (1979) and P. Andersen (1985) labeled touch as a central immediacy factor signaling psychological as well as physical closeness.

While touch is generally considered a positive behavior that conveys warmth and liking, some individuals tend to feel less favorable toward touch. Jourard (1966) was one of the first researchers who noted that different individuals feel differing degrees of positive or negative affect when confronted with the same type of touch. Individuals who have negative reactions to touch are likely to possess the trait of touch avoidance. Touch avoidance has been defined as an attitude or predisposition toward touch

(J. Andersen et al., 1987; P. Andersen & Leibowitz, 1978; P. Andersen & Sull, 1985).

High touch avoiders feel tension, dislike, resentment, and even rejection in certain situations where touching is likely to take place (P. Andersen & Leibowitz, 1978; Goffman, 1971; Jourard, 1966). Sorensen (1979) reported that touch avoiders evaluate a partner more negatively if he or she is touched by that partner. In contrast, low touch avoiders gave more favorable evaluations to partners who touched them than to those who failed to engage them in tactile contact.

Highly touch avoidant individuals may be less likely to reciprocate touch because of their negative predispositions toward touching. P. Andersen (1984) stated that "touch avoiders remain interpersonally remote while touch approachers seek close distances and tactile contact" (p. 14). Moreover, high touch avoiders tend to valence the immediacy of others negatively (P. Andersen, 1984). Individuals giving negative receptions to increased touch may be perceived by their partners as cold, nonimmediate, and defensive. Such attributions are especially likely since both touch, and the absence of touch, are powerful indicators of a relationship's closeness. The partner initiating touch may feel rejected, and this rejection will cause a decrease in further approach attempts. Thus, a negative spiral of defensiveness is created based on partially faulty attributions.

The trait of touch avoidance has been associated with other communication predispositions. Three of these predispositions--closed communication style, high communication apprehension, and low self-esteem, are related to the construct of defensiveness.

Closed communication style is related to defensive interaction while open communication style is conducive to a supportive environment. J. Andersen et al. (1987) found open communication style to be negatively related to high touch avoidance. Open style was defined by Montgomery (1980) as verbal or nonverbal behavior "which allows a communicator to be perceived as he knows himself to be" (p. 483). In a similar definition, Norton (1983) described open communication as unreserved, frank, extroverted, disclosive, and approachable. Thus, open style communication increases the vulnerability of an interactant, which is precisely why some communicators feel threatened by such a style and instead use closed communication. Closed communicator style is characterized by avoidance, introversion, secretiveness, and lack of self-disclosure. Such a style is both self-protective and ego-defensive.

A second trait associated with high touch avoidance is communication apprehension. J. Andersen et al. (1987) found a strong correlation between the constructs of touch avoidance and communication apprehension. As was reported earlier in this paper, high communication apprehensives feel more anxiety and tension in speaking situations than do low apprehensives. Just as touch avoiders are unlikely to reciprocate touch, CAs would tend not to reciprocate high levels of disclosiveness. Argyle and Dean's (1965) affiliative conflict theory explains this nonreciprocal pattern in simplistic terms. Their theory proposed that individuals tend to maintain a "comfort" point within interpersonal relationships. Intimacy beyond this point yields compensatory responses. For individuals who possess negative predispositions toward immediacy, this comfort zone may be quite narrow. The way that the types of nonimmediate behavior used by touch avoiders and CAs relate to one another should be explored further in order to develop different composites of

individuals who may tend to react defensively when confronted with increased immediacy.

Finally, levels of self-esteem are related to touch avoidance. Specifically, J. Andersen et al. (1987) reported a negative correlation between self-esteem and touch avoidance. As will be illustrated in the following section, those with low self-esteem are likely to be more sensitive to disconfirmation and to use defensive reaction.

Disconfirmation

Buber (1957) was the first to label confirmation as a component of positive interpersonal relationships. Since then, many definitions have emerged to describe what types of verbal and nonverbal behavior are confirming and disconfirming. Cissna and Sieburg (1979) asserted that most definitions of confirmation emphasize that confirming interaction is direct, open, and clear. Disconfirming communication, conversely, is characterized as indirect, closed, and ambiguous. Clearly, communicators who are perceived as avoidant, and thus defensive, would fit the latter characterization. Similarly, Sieburg and Larson (1971) defined disconfirmation as "behavior that causes another person to value himself less" (p. 1). Such disconfirming communication produces a threatening situation which is likely to produce a defensive response designed to protect one's ego.

While the concepts of defensive communication and disconfirmation are not isomorphic by any means, they do interplay with one another as two forms of dysfunctional response. According to Cissna (1986) Sieburg originally set out to study dysfunctional responses and then began to label such responses as

disconfirming. Indeed, scholars have reported that disconfirmation is likely to result in a dysfunctional negative spiral of disconfirmation begetting more disconfirmation (Garvin & Kennedy, 1986; Lifshitz & Shulman, 1983). Likewise, Alexander (1973) found that defensive communication is reciprocal.

The cause of dysfunctional types of response often lies in the need to defend oneself against a perceived ego or self-concept threat. Cissna and Keating (1979) defined self-esteem as "the sense each of us has in varying degrees of being a worthwhile, valuable person--which is both fragile and most important to us and to our society" (p. 59). Scholars such as Cissna and Keating (1979) have tenatively linked disconfirmation to self-esteem by predicting that frequent disconfirmation would be likely to produce a decrease in self-esteem. Similarly, lower levels of self-esteem may be indicative of more fragile egos and more predisposition toward defensive interaction. Thus, disconfirmation may be both a cause and an effect of defensiveness within spirals of dysfunctional interaction.

Distinctions between types of disconfirmation have been found. Cissna and Sieburg (1979) labeled three different yet overlapping styles of disconfirming communication: (1) indifference, (2) imperviousness, and (3) disqualification. Communication and psychology research provides considerable linkage between these clusters of disconfirmation and defensiveness. First, indifferent behaviors are similar to avoidance strategies. Second, disconfirmation by imperviousness inherently involves self-awareness and self-concept. Finally, disqualification involves reaction to threat or fear. The ideas that these areas of research contribute to the study of defensiveness will be explored next.

Indifference and Avoidance

Disconfirmation by indifference, as defined by Cissna and Sieburg (1979), occurs when a communicator denies the existence of another by withdrawing from, or somehow ignoring, the other. This can be accomplished through such nonimmediate behaviors as concealing emotion, changing the subject, failing to respond to questions, interrupting the speaker, or engaging in unrelated tasks (Cissna and Sieburg, 1979). Such behaviors can also be classified as avoidance strategies.

Certain individuals have been identified as more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors during threatening situations. For example, Eysenck's (1967, 1976) work on introversion and extroversion posits that introverts engage in avoidance type behaviors because they have higher arousal levels initially and therefore avoid additional arousal. As was illustrated earlier in this paper, verbal withdrawal is the key defensive reaction of high communication apprehensives when they are confronted with threatening situations. Likewise, touch avoiders may find situations in which touching is prevalent to be threatening. Sorensen (1979) found that high touch avoiders feel less positively about situations in which touch occurs frequently and more positive toward contexts where touch is infrequent. Thus, high touch avoiders may withdraw from certain situations.

Withdrawal or avoidance behaviors have been characterized as typically defensive acts by other scholars. For example, Civikly, Pace, and Krause (1977) found that one of the ways defensiveness was exhibited was through withdrawal. In addition, Civikly et al. (1977) proposed that the chief component of confirmation was empathy. The lack of empathy is a major force producing indifference and avoidance. Therefore, those individuals

predisposed toward a withdrawal response are more likely to be perceived as unaffiliative and defensive. Unfortunately, such perceptions may trigger the negative spiral that the individual tried to avoid in the first place.

Avoidance strategies are also discussed in the literature on interpersonal conflict (see Fitzpatrick, Fallis, & Vance, 1982; Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain, 1974; Sillars, 1980a; Sillars, 1980b; Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982). Communication strategies such as irrelevant response, ambiguity, and circumscribed conversation have been correlated with the tactic of conflict avoidance (Sillars et al., 1982) as well as with disconfirmation and defensiveness.

The perceptions and attributions of the receiver should be of central concern to scholars studying defensiveness in interpersonal conflict. Sillars (1980a; 1980b) found that individuals who attributed responsibility for conflicts to their partners, instead of to themselves, tended to use more avoidance strategies. Thus, the degree to which a person tends to shift blame to others may be a factor affecting the likelihood of avoidance behavior. The human tendency all individuals have to blame their partners is inherently defensive in nature, though some individuals may be more likely to shun responsibility than others.

A study by Mortensen (1974) on verbalized conflict found that the adoption of conflict strategies was somewhat dependent upon predispositions. Specifically, Mortensen reported that individuals tend to avoid or engage in conflict based on their attributions. Mortensen (1974) contended that certain individuals are more likely than others to attribute messages as conflict-laden. These individuals are also likely to perceive more ego-threat due to such attributions.

Avoidance strategies can be either disruptive or beneficial to interpersonal relationships. Fitzpatrick et al. (1982) suggested that differences between couple types and individual personalities might account for the variance in the usefulness of avoidance as a conflict-resolving strategy. Another possibility is that couples in which both partners simply avoid conflict, and the disconfirmation that is generated through the conflict, save face. These couples may know which subjects to avoid. On the other hand, couples in which one individual wants to communicate and the other individual wants to avoid, may foster both disconfirmation and defensiveness. The specific role of defensiveness in interpersonal conflict and strategy selection has yet to be documented.

Imperviousness and Self-Awareness

The second type of disconfirmation reported by Cissna and Sieburg (1979) was imperviousness. The term imperviousness was used in Cissna and Sieburg's research to refer to a lack of accurate awareness of another's perceptions. Such a definition is similar to Laing's (1961) view that a person is separate from others, yet deeply influenced by the people with which he or she interacts.

According to Cissna and Sieburg (1979), the disconfirming aspect of imperviousness lies in its ability to "arouse personal doubts about the value of one's own experience and identity" (p. 13). Impervious communication includes statements like" "You don't really mean that . . . ," and "what you're trying to say is . . . " (Cissna and Sieburg, 1979, p. 13). Such responses attempt to somehow correct or reinterpret the source's original message.

Disconfirmation by imperviousness may be especially hard to detect because it often sounds benevolent (Cissna & Sieburg, 1979). Therefore, communicators who are highly self-conscious and self-aware are most likely to detect and be affected by such disconfirmation. As illustrated earlier, high communication apprehensives have been found to be more self-focused than low communication apprehensives. Likewise, other traits may effect levels of self-focus, causing impervious statements to be detected and defensive response to be more likely.

Type "B" individuals, as first introduced by Whitehorn and Betz (1954), may also be more sensitive to disconfirmation by imperviousness. According to Eadie (1978), type "B" individuals are more "self-oriented, dogmatic, concerned with rules and procedures, and judgmental" than type "As" (p. 3). Consistent with the research on communication apprehensives, Eadie (1978) found that type "B" individuals were perceived as more defensive than the other-oriented type "A" individuals.

Within recent psychological literature, objective self-awareness theory has been used as a framework for studying defensiveness (see DeSalvo and Zurcher, 1984; Juni, 1982). Collectively, these researchers felt that individuals who are more self-oriented tend to become defensive if their perceptions of their actual behavior and their ideal behavior are discrepant, or if the outward reactions of others contradict the definitions they have of their personalities. These theories are in agreement with Beck's (1988) assertion that individuals feel threatened when they receive feedback that is inconsistent with their own self-concepts. Beck (1988) contended that such threats produce defensive reactions which are designed to turn disconfirming events into confirming experiences.

Disqualification and Threat

Disconfirmation by disqualification is accomplished when an individual, or an individual's message, is challenged, or when the initial message is so ambiguous or incomplete that the message disqualifies itself. Examples of disqualification include direct disparagement, tangential response, and paradoxical injunction (Cissna and Sieburg, 1979). Obviously, the indifference and the disqualification clusters overlap, especially when the message is unclear. A distinction between direct and indirect disconfirmation by disqualification would separate many of the latter behaviors into the indifference cluster. However, both types of disqualification are reportedly defensive forms of communication:

> All forms of disqualification are believed to be defensive in motivation, with perpetrators striving to shift blame to others or to speak in such a way that they cannot be blamed or even held accountable for having said anything. All forms of disqualification apparently grow out of fear and generate still more fear, defensiveness, and undecidability of messages. (Cissna & Sieburg, 1979, p. 14).

Forms of disqualification are designed by the sender as ego protection. Yet disqualification breeds reciprocity of at least two types of dysfunctional response: disconfirmation and defensiveness. Like the communication apprehensive who engages in strategies of withdrawal, the individual striving to save face who uses the strategy of disconfirmation by disqualification thrusts him or herself into a negative feedback loop.

Interestingly, disqualification may occur in situations where individuals accept some responsibility for blame and want to shift that blame.

Indifference or avoidance may be more prevalent when an individual is able to attribute responsibility to another. How attribution works to regulate the interaction of defensiveness and choice of disconfirmation strategy has yet to be explored. The role defensiveness plays in eliciting nonimmediate, compensatory response also deserves further attention.

Immediacy and Defensiveness

In recent years, communication theorists and researchers have investigated extensively the construct of nonverbal immediacy (see P. Andersen, 1985 for a summary of this research). The immediacy construct is particularly relevant to the defensiveness construct since immediacy and defensiveness are the inverse of one another. According to P. Andersen (1985), immediacy behaviors are approach behaviors that signal availability for communication, are positively arousing or stimulating, and communicate warmth and closeness. Conversely, defensive behaviors are the opposite of immediacy behaviors. Defensive behaviors are often avoidance reactions, which reduce availability for communication, are negatively arousing, and communicate negative interpersonal relations and distance. Indeed, P. Andersen (1985) maintained that as opposed to immediacy behaviors, avoiding another's eyes, closing an office door, or fading away from another person nonverbally tells the other person that the channel is closed and that communication will be difficult.

Research on immediacy can also inform defensiveness researchers about the genesis and development of defensiveness. P. Andersen's (1984, 1985) arousal-

valence model identifies six antecedents of immediacy behaviors that may be useful in future work on defensiveness.

First, social and cultural norms may produce defensive behaviors. Certain national groups such as Germans, Scandinavians, English, white Anglo-Saxons, and the Japanese are behaviorally non-immediate (see P. Andersen, 1988, for a more thorough discussion of these cultural groups). Northern people throughout the world are interpersonally cool and may be perceived as defensive. P. Andersen, Lustig, & J. Andersen (1987), reported a .31 correlation between the latitude of a student's university and the mean degree of touch avoidance. Similarly, crowded or urban environments may produce more defensive behaviors that function as a protective shield from overstimulation. Locked doors, averted gazes, and defensive motions often characterize such environments. In everyday interactions it is unlikely that most communicators will attribute such behaviors to nationality. Attributions about the individual's character are more likely than dismissing defensive behavior as characteristic of New Yorkers or Swedes.

A second source of defensiveness are the traits of individual communicators (see P. Andersen, 1987). Traits are overlearned or innate patterns of behavior that are enacted regardless of the situation. Some individuals, such as the high communication apprehensives or touch avoiders discussed above, are trait-nonimmediate individuals. Their distancing, avoidance, nonaffliliativeness, and unexpressiveness may be attributed to a defensive personality. As in the case of culture, attributions on the part of receivers may be inaccurate. While correctly attributing such behavior as dispositional or trait-like, receivers are less likely to attribute such behavior to shyness or reticence that coldness or unpleasantness.

Third, nonimmediate or defensive behaviors may be the result of a negative interpersonal valence. Negative preinteraction information about another may cause a person to engage in cold, nonimmediate and defensive behavior. Low credibility, attraction, or homophily may produce a set of behaviors which are both encoded and decoded as defensive. Lifshitz and Shulman (1983) found a link between low homophily and disconfirmation, which may contribute to the likelihood of defensiveness occurring.

Interpersonal relationships are the fourth antecedent of defensiveness. A negative relational history may cause avoidance, coldness and/or hostility. Defensiveness often results from fear, conflict, and other forms of relational problems.

Fifth, defensiveness and nonimmediacy may be the result of temporary emotional or physical states. Every person experiences transitory periods of anxiety, depression, or low energy where immediacy becomes difficult to manifest. Such states are frequently the result of exogenous causes unrelated to communication but nonetheless may make communicators seem cold, aloof, or defensive.

Finally, situational factors or the environmental context may result in increased or decreased immediacy. Public versus private evaluative versus nonevaluative, and peer versus power-discepant situations may have an impact on a person's immediacy. Some situational factors motivate intentional strategic behaviors designed to maximize effectiveness and appropriate communication. Other times the situation may produce a dysfunctional and unintentional pattern of behavior as in the case of stage fright or evaluation apprehension. These behaviors are often interpreted as traits or dispositions rather than transitory behaviors resulting in erroneous attributions.

Situational defensiveness or nonimmediacy is often the result of novel or threatening environments in which the individual retreats or attacks rather than making appropriate adaptations to the situation.

The multiple antecedents of defensive behavior suggest that correctly attributing cause is a perilous process for both communicators and communication researchers. Research should examine these multiple antecedents of defensiveness to ascertain if each type results in equivalent behavioral patterns and interpersonal attributions.

Prior research on immediacy has identified a set of behaviors that constitute its behavioral manifestation. Researchers seeking behaviors, particularly nonverbal behaviors, that communicate defensiveness should look at extreme nonimmediacy behaviors as candidates. If nonimmediacy is equivalent to defensiveness the following behaviors should be a part of the defensiveness domain. Proxemically, defensiveness should result in avoidance, greater physical distances, less direct body orientation and more backward leans (P. Andersen, 1985). Tactile communication should be reduced, less intimate, and less enthusiastic. Kinesically, smiles, positive facial expressions, gestural animation, relaxation, and open body positions should be reduced in defensive individuals (P. Andersen, 1985). Indeed, Morris (1977) reported an entire set of behaviors called barrier signals which constitute defensive reactions to social situations. These behaviors often take the form of body cross arm folds and wrist clasps. Defensiveness should result in less eye contact except for long threatening stares. Stern (1977) has shown that infants engage in gaze aversion as a defensive response. "Face aversion can be considered part of an innate avoidance pattern which the newborn shows when an object looms toward his face" (Stern, 1977, p. 41). Head lowering and

turning allow the infant to reduce stimulation while still maintaining the interaction. This suggests that gaze aversion is an innate and basic defensive behavior. Defensiveness may also result in pupilary constriction, an unintentional and unconscious action that may constitute an unobstrusive index of defensiveness. Last, interactional congruence and synchrony should be reduced as a defensive response resulting in awkward interaction and less rapport.

Summary

More work is necessary in order to define and operationalize defensiveness as a communication construct. As Eadie (1978) noted, defensiveness is a little-studied communication phenomenon that is a potential regulator of problem-solving and interpersonal relationships. In order to be useful, defensiveness must be clearly conceptualized, operationalized, and empirically tested. Research needs to address the perceptions and attributions of the receivers as well as the behavior of the senders.

The traits of receivers may affect the likelihood of defensive interaction. This paper examined two trait-like communication dispositions--communication apprehension and touch avoidance.

First, we asserted that communication apprehensives display three predominant behavioral patterns characterized by withdrawal, reduced social awareness, and increased tension and social anxiety. These behaviors were posited to be self-protective, defensive responses that paradoxically cause a negative spiral of fear, anxiety, and defensiveness.

Second, touch avoidance was also posited to lead to compensatory responses and negative interpersonal spirals in certain situations. Touch avoidant individuals typically use closed communication styles and have low self-esteem--two characteristics that have also been found in defensive communicators.

Disconfirmation, which has also been linked to low self-esteem, can be either a cause or effect of defensive communication. Disconfirmation involves a refutation of the other person's value or self-concept, while defensiveness involves a protective stance toward such an ego threat. Examination of the clusters of disconfirming behavior yielded a mini-catalog of both verbal and nonverbal communication that is often inherently defensive in nature.

Finally, we argued that immediacy and defensiveness are opposite constructs. Nonimmediacy, or compensatory response, can result in relational deescalation. How the valencers in P. Andersen's (1984, 1985) arousal-valence model function to create defensive or supportive response has yet to be fully documented. Similarly, a taxonomy of both traits and situations affecting defensiveness needs development. Hopefully, more work on nonimmediacy in general, and defensiveness in particular, will begin so that defensiveness can hold a place in the study of human interaction.

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